



For a
workers'
government

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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The way to beat the cuts

TAX THE RICH!

See page 5



Fight student debt and poverty,
centre pages

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Contact us:

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600,000 under siege in Syria

By Simon Nelson

Since March 2011, nine million Syrians have fled their homes with over 6.5 million internally displaced. Almost three million have sought refuge in Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon.

For more than two years 18,000 Palestinian refugees have been under siege in the Yarmouk refugee camp in Damascus, caught up in fighting between the Syrian government and the armed opposition, most recently Daesh / Islamic State. Fighting has intensified in the last few weeks.

The UN estimates that the residents are surviving on just 400 calories a day with conditions liable to get worse. There has been no running water since September 2014. Before the protests that aimed to topple Assad over 100,000 people were living in Yarmouk.

The Palestinian rebel group Bait al-Maqdis, linked

to Hamas, have been forced into an alliance with the Syrian government in order to try to defeat both Daesh and the al-Qaeda linked Jabhat al-Nusra.

The Palestinian Authority has also pledged its support to the Assad Government in defence of the camp and against Daesh. Daesh were previously repelled from the camp but following a full scale incursion they have now virtually captured the camp, meaning Daesh have come very close to the Syrian capital.

Syrian government airstrikes have used highly destructive (and illegal under international convention) barrel bombs. 36 such bombs have been dropped in Yarmouk since the beginning of April.

The Syrian government is seeking to regain control throughout the country in areas besieged by rebels. Over 600,000 people are now thought to live under siege in Syria.

Airstrikes against Daesh have continued with fighters being targeted near the Kurdish controlled Rojava area as well as western Iraq where Daesh are planning a major assault in Anbar province to regain control of territory they lost to Iraqi government forces and Iranian backed Shia militias.

With Iran backing the Houthi rebels against Saudi backed forces in Yemen, sectarian conflict across the Middle East is intensifying. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are competing for dominance and greater economic and political influence. Iran has been the driving force in maintaining government-held areas in Syria. In Iraq its troops and sponsored militias are often better equipped and trained than the Iraqi army.

Daesh have continued to destroy the 3000-year old ancient city of Nimrud near Mosul in northern Iraq as part of their "cultural cleansing with explosives

and sledgehammers". Daesh have vowed, "Whenever we are able in a piece of land to remove the signs of idolatry and spread monotheism, we will do it."

Iraqi security forces have tried to repel Daesh from the western province of Anbar, one of the largest Sunni areas in the country. But whilst the offensive was being announced by the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Daesh was moving closer to Ramadi, the provincial capital.

Following the Iraqi government's regaining of Tikrit earlier, the offensive in Anbar was meant to consolidate their control in areas previously controlled by Daesh.

However Daesh have concentrated on gaining control of the largest oil refinery in Baiji. They remain in control of Anbar and the northern province of Nineveh.

Stop calling Ed "red"

Press
By Harry Davies

Daily Mail

It's that time of the week when I read the *Mail* and whimper slightly.

I skipped past an article on polyamory ("The man who lives with *two* girlfriends!") because they had made me feel angry enough about their coverage on mental health last week and it's starting to feel a bit personal.

Anyway, party politics dominates, but the *Mail* is still insisting on not being insistent about anything.

First up, the heartwarming sight of Farage meeting a man who speaks no English. "Awkward!" squawks the strapline, leading into a report of the UKIP leader's promise not to send EU migrants home if he's elected. It's unclear as to whether this counts for or against him in the eyes of the *Mail*, but time will tell; sooner or later, they will have to decide to support one of the parties, surely?

Cameron doesn't come off much better. There's a re-

port of a ukulele player telling him to fuck off. Sadly, it wasn't Amanda Palmer. But the report stresses (and illustrates) the "dull" nature of the Tory campaign saying it's out of touch with "ordinary voters". It seems they are flying into a spat with every politician going. Farage "brought to a halt", Cameron told "he's not welcome"; surely they aren't going to support "Red" Ed?

I do love the way the press have taken this particular nickname right to their collective heart. I don't know where they got the idea from. At this point, I was planning on launching into a long and convoluted humorous series of similes to explain the irony in suggesting a socialist connection to Miliband, but life is too short. So I've prepared more of a statement:

In my opinion, Ed Miliband is not really a proper socialist, in the ac-

cepted sense of the word. He's certainly not a Marxist, a Trot or a Bolshevik. Please stop calling him "Red". It makes him sound like a baseball player in the 1930s.

However, the *Mail* has not let me down. Ed too gets slagged off. "Nightmare for Miliband!" they shout, as they report half of Scottish voters saying they will vote SNP. They also pull off the trick of writing an article all about Labour's election promises ("Energy price cap / reduced class sizes / free childcare") only focusing on the Institute for Fiscal Studies warning that these spending plans represent a "big unknown".

I love this phrase. It's a beautiful piece of subtly emotive writing, designed to make its target audience feel threatened by some terrible mysterious, shadowy Kraken.

The *big unknown* is Ed's refusal to set a date for "balancing the books" as they quaintly put it. But no-one (outside a particularly dull accountancy-themed circus) has balanced the books in this country in a very long time, if ever. It's

the nature of capitalism. You know, debt.

So what have I learnt this week? The *Mail* has shifted from skirting the issue to laying into pretty much everyone, apart from the Lib Dems and the Greens, both of whom get boring sideline mentions here and there. I imagine that the aim is to appeal to the angry soul of middle England, grumping and snarling over the papers at breakfast, as if everyone lived in some demented postwar sitcom horror. People who like to rant "All the bloody same, not worth voting for any of them".

And I didn't even mention the article that analyses party success based on the popularity / appeal of leaders' wives. I didn't mention it because I have a very low despair threshold. It refers to these four women as "the wives" and gave me the crawling horrors so much that I actually went and re-read the polyamory article. It turns out to be surprisingly positive.

I feel so much better now that the *Mail* approves of me.

£12 billion cut threat

By Matthew Thompson

The Tories have threatened to cut the welfare budget by £12 billion in the first two years of the next Parliament if they win the General Election in May.

The already announced plan to extend Universal Credit to all working-age claimants by the end of 2017

would save the Government around £2.5 billion, assuming that the deadline doesn't slip beyond then as it now looks likely that it will. So what other benefits have the Tories got in their sights?

Ideas being discussed by ministers and senior civil servants at the Department for Work and Pensions apparently include:

- Means-testing and taxing benefits paid to disabled people and their carers, saving up to £2.5 billion a year
- Scrapping industrial injuries benefits and replacing them with a compulsory compensation scheme paid for by employers, saving around £1 billion a year
- Replacing the benefit cap, currently £26,000 a

year, with regional ones which would be lower outside London

- Limiting Child Benefit to the first two children, saving another £1 billion a year

• **Abolishing Council Tax Support and replacing it with a lower amount paid as part of Universal Credit.**

Demand more from Labour!

By Jill Mountford

Around 200 campaigners attended the 999 NHS Convention on Saturday 11 April in London to discuss building a united movement in defence of the NHS.

The organisers, GMB non-elected officers, are committed NHS campaigners who see a need to unite the vast though somewhat disparate movement of activists and campaigners around the country.

The 999 NHS Convention is one half of a group, 999 Call for the NHS, which split. This group marched 300 miles last summer in defence of the NHS. The other half of the split, still calling themselves 999 Call for the NHS, had their big conference to unite the movement at the end of February with a similar number of people attending. You can see where this might be going!

The agenda of this recent conference was organised around a series of top table speakers, each telling the audience of seasoned health campaigners how bad

things are in the NHS. It was rightly very anti-Tory but wrongly too uncritical and undemanding of Labour.

Overall, it was a bit of stage-managed affair and at times in a not very canny way. Allyson Pollock and Peter Roderick were invited to address the conference on

their NHS Reinstatement Bill (www.nhsbill2015.org/) and therefore, generously lending the event some hard-hitting demands for a Labour government.

Regrettably discussion on the Bill was prevented so more top-table speakers could be heard. Then a cack-handed attempt to stop the

conference voting on whether 999 NHS Convention adopts the Bill or supporting it meant the event ended on a sour note.

Many disgruntled activists wondered what the purpose of the event really was. Shame!



Social housing not social cleansing!

By Charlotte Zalens

Social housing tenants in London have paid £50 million extra in rent over the last three years because housing associations have been re-categorising their properties, changing them from "social" to "affordable".

If a property is categorised as "affordable", housing associations can charge up to 80% of market rate, as opposed to 40% for "social rent". Tenants in properties categorised as "social rent" also get life-

long tenancies while no such guarantees exist for "affordable" properties. As "social rent" tenants move out (or when estates are re-developed) housing associations are quietly converting properties to "affordable".

11,000 properties across the capital have been changed from "social" rent to "affordable" rent in the past three years. Over half of the housing associations involved are charging over 70% of market rent for their "affordable" rent properties. The idea that this is affordable is ridiculous.

The National Housing Federation (NHF), which represents housing associations, claims that housing associations are being forced into raising rents due to cuts in government funding. In 2010 the government made a 63% cut in capital investment budgets for housing associations, resulting in a £3 billion reduction in funding.

Yet the NHF and housing associations have a choice on whether to recategorise properties; they also have a choice to fight government cuts. Housing associations

are happy to pay high executive and director salaries, raise rents and move on tenants deemed to have "spare rooms". The NHF is one of the main drivers behind the "Homes for Britain" campaign that looks to cross-party solutions that are limited to some funding commitment.

Social housing should be publicly owned and controlled, not outsourced to housing associations or arms-length organisations, high quality, and with really affordable rents.

Disabled people and the general election

By Janine Booth, co-Chair, TUC Disabled Workers' Committee (personal capacity)

Over the last five years, the Tory-led government has targeted disabled people with cuts in benefits, closure of services, and attacks on jobs — backed up by a nasty ideological campaign to portray disabled people as "scroungers", which has led to an increase in harassment and abuse. Getting rid of the Tories is literally a matter of life and death for some disabled people.

DPAC: THE REVENGE TOUR

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) is holding "a fortnight of Fight Back and telling politicians throughout the UK what we think of them and what they *must* do if they want our votes."

Headline protests are targeting employment minister Esther McVey (Wirral, 23 April) and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford, 25 April), who have both incurred the fury of disabled people by their relentless attacks on benefits, rights and services. Local campaigners in other areas are organising further actions.

DPAC is asking people to join these protests and organise their own, and is offering some help with travel costs. Email mail@dpac.uk.net.

More information: dpac.uk.net/2015/04/dpac-the-revenge-tour-2/

THE LIBDEMS: CHAMPIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH?

The LibDems are pitching for votes by claiming to be the party that will deliver better services for people with mental health problems.

But for five years, this party has been part of a coalition government

which has caused huge distress to people and then deprived them of the services and benefits they need. The LibDems are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

QUESTIONING CANDIDATES

The Trade Union Congress Disabled Workers' Committee has compiled a set of general election questions. Activists are putting these questions to candidates in order to show disabled people who is and is not on their side, to expose those who are not and to nail down promises from those who may be in power come 8 May. Questions cover: the social model of disability; the Equality Duty; employment rights; Access to Work; jobs; stigma and prejudice; demonisation and hate crime; benefits; independent living; education; education; accessible transport; and participation of disabled people in decision-making.

You can download the questions from the TUC website's disability section.

DOES LABOUR WANT OUR VOTES?

Rachel Reeves, Labour's work and pensions spokesperson, angered many people when she declared in an interview that Labour is "not the party of people on benefits. We don't want to be seen, and we're not, the party to represent those who are out of work." She acknowledged that the Labour Party was "formed for and by working people", but wilfully misinterpreted this as excluding people who are not currently employed, for example because of disability discrimination or mass unemployment.

Disabled people deserve better than this from Labour, and — if it does win the election — will be mobilising to demand that Labour immediately reverse Tory/LibDem attacks.

Hull Red Labour: “The party left us”

Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory supporters Gill Kennett and Dean Kirk were elected as Labour councillors in Hull, but expelled from the party for refusing to vote for cuts. Dean is standing in the May council elections as Hull Red Labour. We spoke to them about the campaign. Another former Labour councillor, ASLEF activist Gary Wareing, is also standing for Hull Red Labour.

Our campaign has been going for five months. We have 25,000 leaflets and letters out already and another 10,000 to go out; regular campaign stalls; and door knocking.

We are discussing with people the need not to fall into the UKIP trap. We are promoting Hull Red Labour's commitment to challenging the oppression of any government that gains power, so we can protect local services.

How do you see the role of left councillors?

Challenging this government as far as you can. Trying to advocate for the people of your ward and your city. Liaising and working with other groups on the left. Trying to educate and explain to people the need to join left groups and not to fall for UKIP and other right-wing lies.

What would you say to those who argue your stand contradicts fighting in the Labour Party?

Being suspended as a councillor means you have to still obey the whip without even having a say in the group. You're faced with a choice. Vote for the cuts. Or vote against them and be expelled.

The Labour Party behaved in a way that shocked and disappointed us. It was the party which left us; we are still the



Dean Kirk and Gill Kennett

same socialists we have been all our adult lives. We look forward to a time when the Labour leadership listens to the rank and file, the great people who are the party's backbone, who are still hoping for a more equitable future for us all. When they listen to the public in general, who are desperate for an alternative to this misery that is being inflicted upon them.

There comes a time when you have to draw a line in the sand, when you have to make a stand. If it contradicts working within the Labour Party, that says more about the Labour Party than us. If you're an MP you can vote against something and remain an MP in the party. If you are a member of the party, you can try and recruit and bring people into the party who share your views and values, but for councillors you have to put your career on the line if you are going to remain true to your beliefs.

What support have you had?

We have support from many Labour Party members, but they can't do much or they would face suspension or expulsion too.

We've had huge support from the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) nationally and they have invited us to numerous meetings and discussions. The LRC locally has given us a great deal of support. We have also had support from the Hull People's Assembly, and from a wide variety of left groups.

We work closely with the trade unions in a professional, open and transparent manner as councillors. They are in a difficult position due to their affiliations to Labour. However, many individual union members — from all unions — value the stand we have taken and have given support verbally and practically, including leafleting on a regular basis. That includes Unison, Unite, GMB, NUT and private sector unions as well.

On every occasion we have voted against the council budget, we've had members from many different unions lobbying outside the Guildhall and in the public gallery to show their support. We've consulted with the unions on our alternative budgets before submitting them.

At Unison's 2013 conference a motion was unanimously passed a motion to support and enter dialogue with Councillors against the Cuts. In the 2014 conference comrades tried to reinforce that motion and seek clarity from the union bureaucracy about why no action had been taken. This was ruled out of order. The Unison leadership has been dismissive.

What are you saying about other council elections and about the general election?

We don't know what will happen in Hull. We are hugely concerned that people will vote for UKIP, masquerading as a party for the people while its opportunist right-wing leaders pit people against those from other countries. People need to understand they have more in common with a Polish cu-

cumber picker than with the British owner of that company.

There is an issue that the Labour vote is taken for granted in Hull and some councillors feel they have people's loyalty as a given.

We hope Dean will be elected, and if so he will work with Labour as we judge appropriate. This may be quite often. Nationally, we want Labour to be elected. The alternative is devastating. The question is whether they offer the people who elected them hope or betray them. We need Labour to be the party of hope.

We believe that young people should be educated in schools and in further education on the subject of politics, the history of politics, why it is important to vote and how to vote in an informed way. They should have the opportunity to have their input and their voice heard and be given the vote at sixteen. Young people have continuously shown that they are interested in their future and have a right to be part of how it is shaped.

What demands would you raise on a Labour government?

We need Labour to give a real alternative to the neoliberal agenda that currently dominates. That means:

- Re-nationalise our services (railways, gas, electricity, water).
- Remove private profit from health, education and social services.
- A statutory living wage, abolish zero hour contracts, end the wage freeze.
- Invest in building social housing and create quality apprenticeships to give young people a future and most of all hope.
- Abolish the bedroom tax and place a cap on private rents.
- Higher taxes on the rich and a clampdown on tax avoidance.
- Reverse all spending cuts.
- Public investment in creating green jobs, renewable energy and energy efficiency.
- Increases to welfare and pensions should at least match inflation.
- A stop to scapegoating of immigrants and those on welfare.
- A publicly owned, democratic banking system.
- A commitment to a publicly owned pharmaceutical industry to stop the rationing of vital drugs which extend life and improve people's lives.
- The mansion tax should be changed to a land tax
- End the cost of war in blood and money: no military interventions, no Trident replacement.

What is the relevance of socialism today?

It's not so much the relevance as the necessity of socialism today! Socialist ideas are more important than they have been since the 1930s.

The world is being destroyed by a capitalist system which can't stop until it has squeezed every iota of profit from every aspect of our lives. Vast areas of fertile land are being laid bare; our water is disappearing or being made unusable. The delicate ecosystem is being thrown off balance as millions of animals and insects are killed off. The total greed of 1% is the cause, though they work hard to cause division so that people blame each other for their ills. History shows why we must avoid that at all costs.

Socialism is relevant because without it this civilisation can't survive.

- councillorsagaincuts.org

Letters



Nationalise land!

We should add two demands to Pete Gilman's list in his excellent article on socialist housing policy (Solidarity 358): nationalisation of land, and public ownership (state and municipal) of construction.

As Pete points out, most of the dwellings being built in London and other housing-shortage areas are for sale or rent at luxury levels. Yet they are not palaces with huge gardens. Mostly they are small flats built to ordinary construction specifications.

The profits from their high prices go to property developers or landlords.

The real-estate advisers Savills report that: "London residential land values have grown by 87% since their low of March 2009, and now, on average, exceed their 2007 peak", which according to government figures was £10.5 million per hectare.

Property developers make more than landlords, because much urban building land is publicly-owned, only a tiny proportion of land is bought and sold each year (so landlords can't cash in notional gains), and ground rents (the portion of rent paid to the owner of the land rather than the building) have since the 19th century become a small proportion of total rents.

Still, the Duke of Westminster got to no.10 in the Sunday Times Rich List 2015 on the strength of his landed wealth.

In 2013 Ed Miliband said that the profits of the four biggest housing developers had soared by 557% that year. He accused them of hoarding land to push up its value.

Public ownership of all land and of construction would cut out the property developers' and landlords' profits.

It would also create stable jobs for construction workers, and a chance to win good conditions. Coupled with authority for councils to compulsorily-purchase and redevelop underused property (there are still many more empty dwelling spaces than homeless), it would quickly allow everyone a decent home.

Rhodri Evans, north London

The Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory is campaigning to elect a Labour government in May 2015.

The SCLV wants to combine campaigning for a Labour government with clear working-class demands, to boost working-class confidence, and strengthen and transform the labour movement so it is fit to fight.

- socialistcampaignforalabourvictory.wordpress.com





Tax the rich!

The Tories, their arrogance boosted by having got through five years of cuts and wage squeeze and still having some chance of re-election, promise a cut in inheritance tax.

They have already cut corporation tax and the top rate of income tax.

The Labour leadership promises bitty taxes on the rich here and there, but nothing large-scale.

On 13 April Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls publicly rebuked the right-wing leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Jim Murphy, for saying there will be no new cuts under a Labour government.

Murphy was striving to make ground against the Scottish National Party, which strikes an anti-cuts pose despite making large cuts in Scotland. But Balls said Labour would make cuts.

Shadow business minister Chuka Umunna went further: "There will be the need for further consolidation and cuts throughout the rest of the parliament".

At the Labour Party's National Policy Forum in July 2014, all the big unions joined with the Labour leaders to vote

down a move from constituency activists to commit a Labour government to refusing cuts.

Both to stop the Tories winning on 7 May, and to make a new Labour government other than a disaster, the unions need to start standing up for their members, their own policies, and the working class. They should demand that Labour tax the rich and reverse social cuts.

The top one thousand people alone in the UK have individual wealth totalling £519 billion. If those top thousand were reduced to £1 million each (to routine luxury, rather than ultra-riches) then that would yield £518 billion.

£97.4 billion dividends were paid out in 2014 to shareholders of big business, not for any work, but just for being rich enough to own shares.

As for the banks, HSBC alone made profits of £12 billion in 2014, and that was a drop from 2013, worse than expected. Bonuses in finance and insurance totalled £14 billion last year, down from previous years because some of what used to be paid in bonuses has been renamed "allowances".

The chief executives of just the top 100 firms (FTSE 100) had paid themselves £3.3 million each (median) in the last

Shareholders scoop \$10,000 from each householder

From the new wealth produced by the labours of the average household in the USA, the shareholders of US big business will scoop around \$10,000 in the coming year.

The figure was about \$8,000 in 2014, and is expected to rise. It doesn't include the gains from higher share prices which shareholders may or may not cash in. It counts only the hard cash they get in dividends and operations in which businesses buy back their own shares.

Some of the shareholders are also workers, contributing through their labour to the surplus value they get back via shareholdings. The USA has a much wider distribution of shareholding than most other capitalist economies.

But the great bulk of the money goes to the rich — managers whose "wages" are really an allocation from surplus value, self-employed "professionals", and so on. On William Domhoff's figures, over 80% of stocks and mutual funds are held by the top ten per cent.

The \$10,000 is only a part of surplus value, but it is one of the purest forms of surplus value. No-one can claim that it's about compensation for managerial labour, or for taking risk, or for thrift.

It's income which people get just from already being wealthy.

The gap between that sort of income, from already being wealthy, and the income which workers get from selling their labour power to the owners of wealth, is getting wider and wider.

year's figures available as of October 2014.

The top one per cent of adults in the UK pocket £130 billion a year, or an average of £260,000 each. If they were reduced to being modestly well-off on £30,000 a year each, that would yield £115 billion a year for social spending.

The 2010-15 cuts in local services, health, public service workers' real pay, education, and benefits in Britain, have been huge in their social impact. But small in comparison to the wealth of the rich: about £18 billion from benefits, £16 billion from education and local services, over five years.

In arithmetic, to reverse the cuts would need only modest taxation of the rich. In real politics, to get that taxation will need a great working-class mobilisation, willing to press on through the claims that tax would be "crippling business" and making "talent" flee.

That mobilisation will not stop at just taxing, but will take control of the banks and the big corporations, to run them under public ownership and democratic and workers' control, for social aims.

Help us raise £15,000!

Workers' Liberty stands for a society where the crises, exploitation and inequality of capitalism are replaced by collective ownership and sustainable planning for people's needs — socialism.

But socialist voices are currently small and marginal. We have to educate, agitate and organise to turn the tide and create an emancipated future.

In order for Workers' Liberty to contribute to that fight we need to expand our sources of funds. We are launching a fundraising drive to raise £15,000 by our annual conference in November. Will you help us reach that target?

Recently we expanded the number of workers in our office, and have increased our output of books, pamphlets and other publications. We want to overhaul our website. None of this can be maintained or improved without funds.

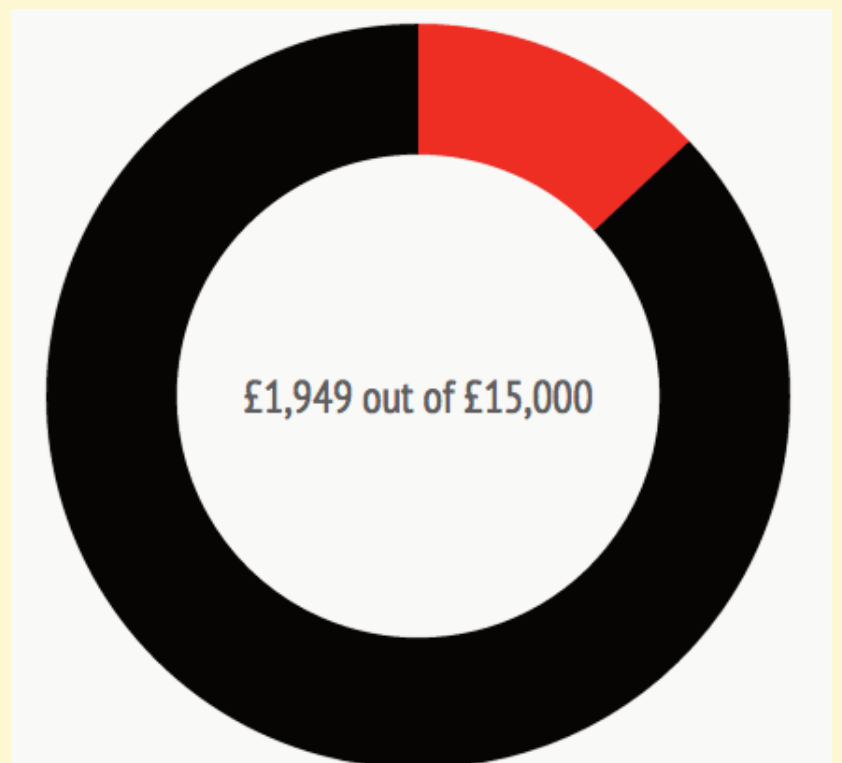
We have no big money backers. We rely on contributions from workers and students like you! So please consider:

- Getting a subscription to our weekly newspaper, *Solidarity* — workersliberty.org/subscribe
- Taking out a monthly standing order.
- Making a one-off donation.
- Organising a fundraising event in your local area.
- Committing to do a sponsored activity and asking others to sponsor you.
- Buying some of our books, posters, autocollants or pamphlets

For information on standing orders or how to donate visit workersliberty.org/donate

For more ideas and information on fundraising visit workersliberty.org/fundraising

We have made a brilliant start to our fundraising this week and have so far we have raised £1949. Thanks this week to Ed, Norwich Workers' Liberty, Edd, an anonymous comrade and three *Solidarity* subscribers.





UCL students fight back

By Omar Raii

Students at Hawkridge House (a hall for UCL students) have been withholding rent due to an ongoing dispute with UCL Accommodation, over the delay of building works that has severely disrupted student's lives, especially making it harder to revise over the Easter break.

Since February, residents at Hawkridge, predominately overseas postgraduate students, have seen their homes transformed into a construction site as UCL – who charge £132.20 per week for a single room – erected scaffolding on all sides of their 14-story tower block. Early morning drilling, dusty rooms and a lack of sunlight and privacy have since been the norm, causing stress and health issues and leaving students unable to revise in their rooms.

For many students over the years, the increasing privatisation and outsourcing that has taken place on universities, including in student accommodation, and they've had to deal with the inevitable consequences of this which includes spiralling rents and worsening living conditions.

The action taken has already led to the university suspending the building work and the students are now planning to continue their rent strike until they receive due compensation for the disruption already caused. There are even talks of other UCL halls taking similar action over unacceptable living conditions.

This only shows the benefits of what happens when students organise to fight back, rather than feeling they can do nothing to resist the onslaught of exploitation that increasingly business-orientated universities are inflicting on them.

When students fight back, they can win!



Students battle ag

By Beth Redmond

At University College London, where as part of the Cut The Rent! Campaign activists have extracted plenty of shocking statistics from management, rent increases by 5% each year.

On top of that, the amount of money the university puts into maintaining the halls of residence decreases each year, while the profit they receive sky-rockets.

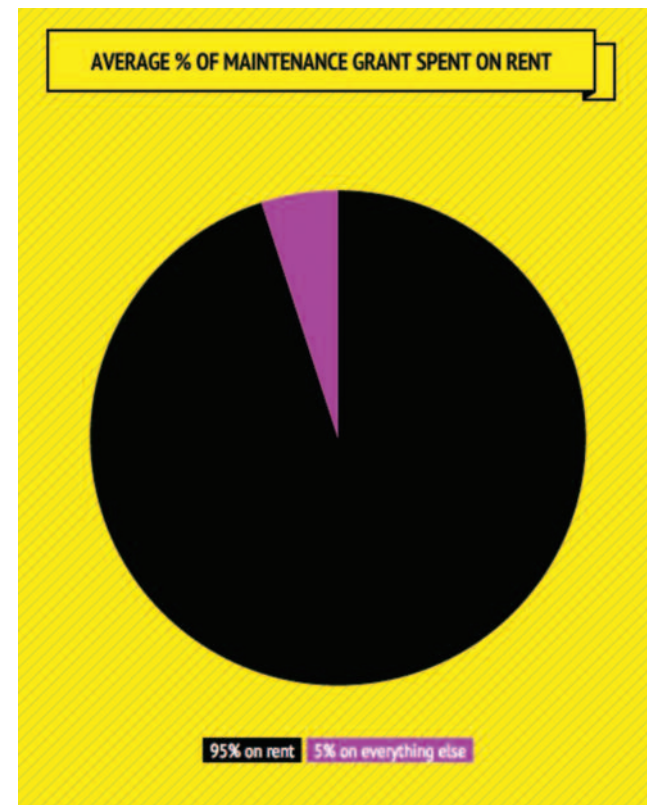
Because not much money is invested in the halls, they are often infested with cockroaches or mice. Things get broken and remain unrepaired or the water is shut off for days on end without students receiving any compensation.

On average, 95% of maintenance grants are spent immediately on rent, leaving not much at all for everything else. The "official" number of students using food banks has increased massively over the last two years, with one chaplain referring at least five students a week to the local food bank, as opposed to none at all two years ago.

When universities run their accommodation services for huge profit means, rent strikes hit them hard and are a very effective method of protesting. By withholding £200,000 in rent, UCL activists forced management to concede two demands almost immediately.

Encouraging students to compete against each other for the "experience" to get jobs has been capitalised on by big businesses. Employing students and paying them a slave wage, if anything at all, and telling them they should be grateful for the experience is more or less the norm now. Only those who have rich, generous parents can afford to work for free as a step towards the best paid jobs.

In 2010, it was estimated there were 70,000 interns in the UK. A fifth of them were working for no wage, and in the



worst cases for no travel or food compensation either. Your "success" should not depend on the state of your parents' bank account.

The Labour Party has announced plans to ban unpaid internships that last longer than four weeks if they win the general election, but why stop there? Accommodating big businesses disguised with doing something in the interests of poorer people isn't good enough.

As seen in the graphic below, the £9,000 generation, on average, are coming away from university with debt nearing £60,000, with the average starting salary for a graduate falling each year.

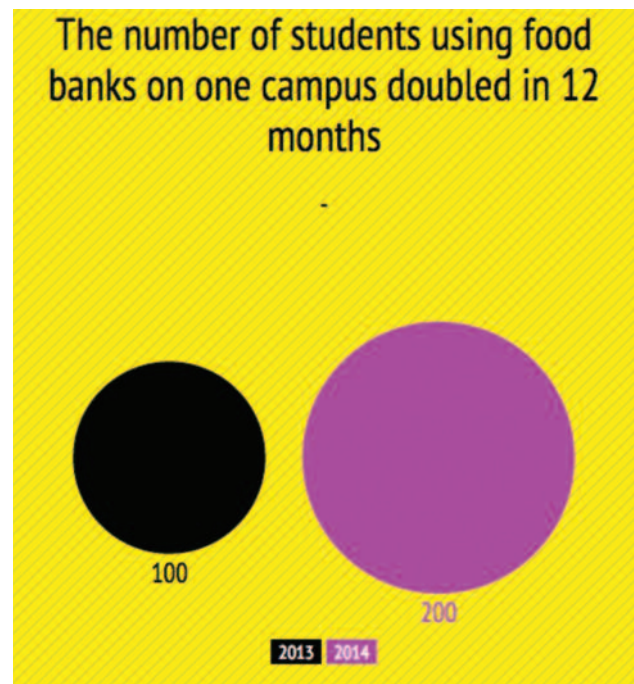
Those who graduated in 2008 will have done so with £22,000 worth of debt.

The Office for Budget Responsibility reckons that 45% of payments due on student-loan debt will never be made.

The odds are stacked against poorer people when it comes to higher education, and this is increasingly relevant to further education now too, with the government cutting adult education by 24%.

Persuading the "average" student that there are alternatives to the current structures in place around student loans and tuition fees should be a priority.

With the National Union of Students being next to useless on making any tangible change to students' lives, it is up to us, the left, to organise effective strikes to stop rent hikes and mobilisations for free education.



gainst poverty

End casualisation for fractionals!

By Gerry Bates

Warwick University has set up a company, Teach Higher, which until the University backtracked, was going to be a means to outsource hourly paid academic staff. The University now say Teach Higher will not be a subsidiary, but a department within the university. Staff will be directly employed on current terms and conditions.

It is good the University have backtracked but no one can be complacent. At the very least a Teach High “department” will be a way of streaming casualisation throughout the University — employment more hourly-paid academic staff.

Ultimately Teach Higher could become something like Uni Temps, which mainly employed, catering, cleaning and security staff at universities across the country. We don’t know why Warwick decided to set up a separate company for outsourced academic staff, except that they possibly felt the need for ‘re-branding’ because it slightly more difficult to impose hyper-casualised positions on a previously more prestigious type of work such as academia.)

This academic year hourly paid academics will be recruited via Teach Higher only in order to carry out exam invigilation. They plan to pilot it with all other academic work (e.g. teaching) from October 2015 onwards.

Academia is turning into a two tier system — with low paid casualised staff (who increasingly do the bulk of departmental teaching) separated out from permanent staff.

For a couple of years now, casualised academic staff in Higher Education have been beginning to organise at a grassroots level — no longer willing to put up with working excessively long hours for what works out at less than the minimum wage, when universities increasingly rely on us to provide the majority of their teaching.

In February 2015 a national FACE conference (Fighting Against Casualisation in Education), attended by over 150 people, brought together casualised academics from across the UK to share their experiences of organising against this kind of exploitation. Perhaps Teach Higher should be seen as management’s response to such exciting new developments.

FACE are saying end casualised contracts and give fractional and fixed-term staff the same rights as permanent staff.

• More information:

<https://faceducation.wordpress.com>

STOP THE CUTS TO FURTHER EDUCATION

MARCH TO CITY HALL, LONDON ON APRIL 25

UCU
University and College Union

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BIT.LY/UCUDEMO

▲ **£2,997,000**

The increase in UCL's income from accommodation over 2 years

▼ **£2,924,000**

The decrease in UCL's expenditure on accommodation over 2 years

Occupation as a tactic, not a campaign

By Beth Redmond

For the last three weeks, students at the University of the Arts, London, have been occupying a space on the Central Saint Martin's campus to protest against 570 foundation course closures and dozens of job losses.

It came as part of a small wave of occupations across London, with three others occupying to step up the fight against neoliberalism and the marketisation of our institutions.

Because the campaign at UAL has been directed on imminent cuts, with the prospect of university management collapsing at some point, it has been the focal point for London-wide activism for the past month or so. Meetings with representatives from universities all over London, as well as Warwick, Birmingham, Manchester and Amsterdam, have organised demonstrations, direct action and a campaign collective called the Free University of London.

Last week, management notified the occupation that legal proceedings had been initiated against the protesters, naming 15 people on an injunction, including three of the sabbatical officers at UAL.

On Tuesday April 14, those who were named on the injunction negotiated a deal in court, where no costs would be incurred for the students and no disciplinary action taken against them if the occupation left by 3pm. Protesters are adamant that this does not mean the campaign is over. The occupation was a tactic, not a campaign.

Both an injunction and possession order were granted, meaning that it is now illegal for students named on the injunction to occupy again.

Around 200 students gathered outside the court to support those inside, and marched from the Royal Courts of Justice to Central Saint Martin's campus.

University management taking students to court as a means of intimidating them out of protesting in the future is not a new thing, but it is becoming the norm, so it is important that solidarity and support are provided for those who are facing repression.

Megan Dunn, the vice president for higher education of NUS, showed her face at the demo, but we should remember all the other students who have been in similar situations and have been ignored by the organisation.

Occupy UAL have organised a feeder march to the UCU's Stop Cuts to Further Education march on April 25, meeting at Central Saint Martin's at 11:30.



EU set to push Greece to its knees

By Theodora Polenta

After the re-invigoration of the squares movement with mobilisations in support of the Syriza-led government and against the Troika (EU-ECB-IMF) blackmail, the movement is slowly starting to intervene with mobilisations which are not anti-government (except those of the anarchist groups) but seek to “remind” the government of its election commitments and to counter the Troika’s ultimatums.

The process is slow, but we can see the first steps of it. There were demonstrations of 10,000 in Thessaloniki / Skouries-Chalkidiki against the gold mining activities of Eldorado Gold and to “remind” the government of its pledges to kick Eldorado Gold out of Chalkidiki.

Workers in the mobile phone companies Vodafone and Wind have mobilised, demanding Collective agreements (as promised by Syriza before the election) and an end to workers being employed via subcontractors.

During the weekend 3-6 April 3 to 6 the BIOME workers, the ERT-3 workers, Chalkidas cement workers, and the Ministry of Finance cleaners, staged a caravan from Thessaloniki to Athens with a series of intermediate stations.

This is the hope for Greece: the activation of the militant rank and file working-class and social movements.

They demand that Syriza carry out the program on which it was elected by the Greek people, that it allow working-class people a chance to breathe, and that it not submit to the cynical blackmail of the financiers and the Troika.

If the Syriza-led government concludes an agreement with the lenders in the current political climate and correlation of class forces, it will mean not just abandoning the great visions of the left, but also abandoning the very modest “Thessaloniki declaration”.

If the Syriza-led government submits to the EU leaders’ pressure, then it will be implementing a new austerity, only a little more elastic and less brutal than the previous one. The effect for the whole of the left (including the anti-capitalist revolutionary left) will be detrimental: massive disappointment, and a shift to the right and the far right.

If the Syriza government refuses to be blackmailed and implements the Thessaloniki declaration, then Greece will most probably be kicked out of the eurozone with the agreement not only of Germany but also of Greece’s supposed allies in the USA, France, and Italy. But there is no alternative for the radical forces within and outside Syriza.

It is not the currency that determines the state of the econ-

Only 30% in UK are religious

A survey reported in the *Guardian* of 13 April has found that the UK is one of the world’s least religious countries, as measured by people’s opinions.

Only 30% of those surveyed in the UK said they were religious. 53% said they were not religious, 13% said flat-out that they were atheists, and the other 4% “didn’t know”.

Apart from China, where there would be government pressure against calling yourself religious, the only other countries to report smaller numbers of “religious” people were Hong Kong, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Sweden, and Japan.

So why does the UK have an Established Church, and so many faith schools? It is not because of irresistible pressure from a heavily-religious population. It is calculated government policy.

According to an official report: “At the start of September 2014 there were 6,848 state funded faith schools in England. The majority were primary schools; 6,210 or 37% of all state funded primaries. The 638 secondary faith schools made up 19% of all state funded mainstream secondaries. The proportion of state funded faith schools has increased from 35% of primaries and 16% of secondaries in January 2000”.

A survey commissioned by the *Guardian* in June 2014 found: “58% of voters now believe faith schools, which can give priority to applications from pupils of their faith and are free to teach only about their own religion, should not be funded by the state or should be abolished”.



Anti-austerity march in Athens on 1 April

omy but the economic system itself.

Against the sloganeering of a government of “all Greeks”, we must fight for a class-based working-class government of the left! For a progressive taxation system! Make the rich pay for the crisis! For a Memorandum for the rich!

The permanent chorus of the blackmail from “our partners” is that we must choose euro or drachma. But more than half of the population of the country have no euros in their pocket. They do not care whether the currency is euro or ruble or drachma or dinar, as long as they can live a decent life.

That is what the “European institutions” deny them. The “institutions” tell the Greek working class that the resources for a decent life can be found only if we expropriate those who have been stealing our lives, if only rebuild the economy on new social foundations for the social needs of the vast majority of the people and not for the profit of a few, with the nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy under workers’ control.

Time is running out. Ahead of the crucial meeting of the eurozone finance ministers on 24 April, the Syriza government is preparing to send another list of “reforms” — the fourth in a row — raising the fiscal adjustments to €10 billion (above the €8.5 billion of the previous list).

The Troika is demanding permanent austerity measures and not the “emergency” one-off measures preferred by the Syriza-led government. The government has been attempting to fill the budget gap with measures such as the “closure” of pending tax-arrears cases.

Reuters reports that in the opinion of the ECB, the Greek draft law on the protection of primary residences exceeds the limits of the protection of persons with low incomes and probably encourage some to make a deliberate decision not to repay their loans.

IMF chief Christine Lagarde has called for further cuts to pensions. “The pension system is doomed to bankrupt the Greek economy is unsustainable and must be reformed”.

Reported demands include the abolition of so-called “early retirement”, further consolidations of pension funds, phasing-out of “charges for third parties” (which in a number of cases constitute the substantive employer’s contribution), and a closer connection between pension contributions and incomes.

Troika demands are reported to include the further expansion of VAT on mass popular consumption goods and the elimination of “exemptions” and tax reliefs for working-class and worse-off households.

The government is trying to shift these issues into the next “big deal”, which will follow the end of the four-month extension based on eurozone finance ministers’ decision of 20

February but still not completed sufficiently to get new credits released to Greece.

The Troika says that if the current government wishes to “replace” the regressive property tax of the previous regime, then it needs to implement other unpopular measures of “equivalent performance”. It demands that revenue aims from privatisation be confirmed.

There is clear evidence that the rest of the port of Piraeus will be given over to privatisation, regional airports the same.

The concessions already made by the Syriza-led government are not theoretical and abstract. All the pro-working-class measures announced in the first days of the government have been postponed — even the simplest, such as the abolition of the €5 fee to visit hospitals. The abolition of the property tax has been postponed. Gold-mining activities continue at Eldorado Gold at Skouries/Chalkidiki...

In its 20 February agreement with the eurozone finance ministers, Syriza committed itself not to proceed to any “unilateral action”, meaning that every important bill that the government wants to pass must have the approval of the EU leaders.

There is no longer a request for cancellation of any part of the debt. There is no longer a request for a European conference on the debt.

Instead of bringing in a Bill re-instating the minimum wage and collective bargaining agreements, the Minister of Labour has prioritised “dialogue with social partners.” A tripartite meeting, with the bosses’ organisations and the unions has been called for 15 April to discuss the minimum wage and collective bargaining. It was the representatives of the bosses that the Minister of Labour met first as he took over.

The plan now is that in October 2015 the minimum wage will increase to €650, and then in July 2016 the minimum wage will be €751.

LOANS

Greece paid €450 million to the IMF on 9 April. It had already paid the IMF €1.5 billion at the end of March.

To scrape together the money to pay the IMF, the government had borrowed large sums from the pension fund; requested a pay-out from the state healthcare insurer of €50 million; asked the Athens Metro and other companies, including the electricity and water providers, to lend the state money; retained €120 million intended to finance hospitals.

These loans have a very short time frame, and are aimed at avoiding a budget crisis while the government is in talks with the so-called troika of the IMF, European Central Bank and European Union (EU) commission.

Meanwhile €26 billion have been withdrawn from the Greek banks in the last two or three months.

Further payments totalling around €6 billion are due for repayment by the end of May. Greece will be able to make them only with the help of external loans. Otherwise, state bankruptcy looms and potential exclusion from the eurozone.

However, along with the police, the military has been excluded from budget cuts. On 15 March, Tsipras signed a contract for the modernisation of five surveillance aircraft at a cost to the state of €500 million. Defence Minister Panos Kammenos of the right-wing Independent Greeks (Anel) demanded the expenditure in order to be able to meet NATO requirements.

The militant wing of the labour movement and the unions must reject the logic of “social dialogue”, which has cost the labour movement dear in the past. We must fight for the “here and now”.

Since the day Syriza was elected on 25 January, the EU and the ECB have pushed the Greek economy towards suffocation. Their aim is to transform Syriza into a “systemic party”, a party that will not threaten in any way the big interests and the basic structures and functioning of the capitalist system. The program of Syriza, as depicted in the Thessaloniki declarations, does not constitute any kind of radical or revolutionary program. It includes neither nationalisation, nor measures for social and workers’ control and management, let alone... socialism.

It is just a series of proposals to deal with the worst effects of the crisis and the effects of the five years of Memoranda imposed by the EU “partners”. But those EU “partners” are not allowing the government to implement even that.

“Bottom rail on top this time”

9 April was the 150th anniversary of the surrender of the South in the American Civil War. In this speech given at recent AWL public meetings, Sacha Ismail explains what that war and what came after are so important.

The American Civil War is not dry, dusty history. It is relevant to the inspiring protests against racism going on in the United States now. The US of today — a capitalist democracy, but one deeply racist and unequal even by the standards of capitalism — was created by revolution, but also the betrayal of that revolution.

Between 1861 and 1865, the US fought a bloody war in which over six hundred thousand of its citizens were killed. At the root of that war was the situation of black Americans, African Americans, the vast majority of whom were slaves.

When the war began, both sides said they would preserve slavery; the Northern side, led by Abraham Lincoln, said the outcome of the war would not change the situation of the slaves. But the slaves and their white allies insisted otherwise. Through their mass struggle they changed the course of the war and made it into a revolution.

This revolution resulted in the expropriation of four billion dollars of property, in 1860s prices, without compensation, and the liberation of four million human beings from being property. Its later betrayal should not make us forget that.

American society was founded by British colonists on the basis of unfree labour — indentured white servants and black chattel slaves kidnapped from Africa or descended from kidnapping victims. Gradually, for various reasons, indentured servitude declined and black slavery became more important.

In the 1770s and 80s most of the British colonies in North America freed themselves from British rule by revolution, and created the United States. In the Northern part of the US, this revolution undermined slavery. In the South, where the movement against Britain was led by slave-owning planters, it did the opposite. After independence, with the invention of industrial methods of cotton production, slavery flourished as never before. Anti-slavery movements, which had been strong at the time of the revolution, declined.

This began to change in the 1820s. As the US settled more and more of the Western lands it had stolen from the Native Americans as it committed genocide against them, there was growing conflict about who would settle them — free farmers oriented to Northern capitalism or slave plantations like in the South. Increasingly this conflict reshaped US politics.

IGNORE

Repeated slave revolts and non-stop slave resistance on a smaller scale, combined with the rise of a new anti-slavery movement, “abolitionism”, led by free black people and white radicals in the North, pushed the issue of slavery onto the agenda even when most Northern capitalists and politicians wanted to ignore it for the sake of order and profit.

In the 1850s, a proto-civil war broke out in the new Western settlement of Kansas. The old system of political parties collapsed and a new, moderately anti-slavery political party, the Republicans, swept across the North. The radical wing of this party was shaped by the kind of people who had revived the anti-slavery movement thirty years before.

The slaveowners became highly alarmed. They cracked down on all vestiges of democracy, even for white people, in the South. They fought hard to maintain their domination over the national government. As they were pushed back, they increasingly began to speak about leaving the US. When the Republicans’ Abraham Lincoln won the presidency in 1860s, eleven slave states left “seceded”.

The new slave-owners’ state, the Confederacy, existed to preserve slavery. The Northern government, on the other hand, insisted it would not touch slavery in the South, and that victory in the war would not change that. It promised to repress any slave revolts in areas it conquered, and most of its generals were racist conservatives who returned runaway slaves to their owners — even though those owners were the enemy!

Thousands of black men flooded the recruiting officers to volunteers as soldiers, but were told they could not fight. “This is a white man’s war”, was the slogan. And, indeed, US law made it illegal for black people to serve as soldiers.

US policy was shaped in part by capitalist logic about property rights, in part by racism and in part by concerns



about keeping the loyalty of the slave-owners in the border states that had not seceded. Within two years, however, this situation had changed. Why?

The war did not go well for the North. It experienced a string of defeats. Its morale sagged. It seemed the British and French governments would recognise the Confederacy as an independent state and intervene to help it win independence.

Despite their treatment, more and more slaves ran away and came to the Northern army. It became what the historian WEB Du Bois called a slave “general strike”. Officers sympathetic to the anti-slavery movement welcomed runaways in and dared the government to do anything about it. Meanwhile anti-slavery activists and the radical wing of the Republicans, who were strong in Congress, denounced Lincoln’s policy and demanded a more radical one.

From mid-1862 the Radical Republican-dominated Congress overturned Lincoln’s policies. They forbid the return of runaways, legalised and called for the recruitment of slaves and free black men as soldiers, and moved towards the confiscation and liberation of rebels’ slaves. They also did things like cracking down on the illegal Atlantic slave trade and recognising the independent black republics of Liberia and Haiti.

Under growing pressure Lincoln issued an Emancipation Proclamation which freed the big majority of Southern slaves on 1 December 1863. The recruitment of black soldiers, mostly ex-slaves, began — you can read about it in a Workers’ Liberty pamphlet, *Revolution for black liberation* — and the stream became a flood. By the end of the war almost 200,000 black soldiers and sailors took part in the war — one tenth of the Northern military in total and one fifth by the end.

As Karl Marx, who had been involved in the British workers’ protests against slavery and was a keen supporter of the North, said, the US had stopped trying to fight a strictly constitutional war against slavery, and at least started fighting a revolutionary one.

Black soldiers had to fight a political battle to get equal pay and equal rights even in the army.

Thousands of miles away in Britain, this change produced a tremendous mass movement by trade unionists and workers in protest against British government support for the slave-owners. There were meetings and demonstrations of many thousands, demonstrations widely credited with preventing Britain from intervening.

Despite growing mass revolt by its workforce, the Confederacy did not finally collapse until April 1865, four years after the start of the war. It was after that, in the period of about fifteen years after the war, known as Reconstruction, that the Second American Revolution really took off.

After the crushing of the Confederacy, the South was swept by a massive struggle by the ex-slaves for their rights.

Black soldiers and ex-soldiers turned activists were a large part of what made this possible. Under the protection of the occupying Northern army and organised activist groups involving many former soldiers black men exercised the right to vote and won political office, sometimes high political office. All women were disenfranchised at this time, though many women played a vital role in the struggle, North and South.

Many of these black politicians had been free before the war, but some were former slaves. Civil War veterans were central. The most dramatic example was perhaps Robert Smalls, who escaped from slavery by daringly piloting a Confederate boat, full of guns and cannons, to the Northern fleet. His ship was then used to transport black troops to the South. Smalls became the captain, a South Carolina politician and then a Radical Republican member of Congress.

This was in some ways the most democratic period black Americans have ever known. As a former slave who found the group of Confederate prisoners he was guarding included his former owner, shouted out: “Hello massa. Bottom rail on top dis time!”

To give you a flavour of the period: in South Carolina, where black political influence was strongest, the state university enforced desegregation, abolished tuition fees and established a range of access courses.

It is important to understand this process as one of class struggle. The former slaves used Reconstruction to push for demands for state schools, access to public facilities and above all redistribution of the land they worked on. But the struggle for land was defeated, leading eventually to the betrayal and defeat of the whole revolution.

The most extreme Radical Republicans supported giving the land to the ex-slaves and poor whites in order to make democracy secure. But by the 1870s, the US capitalist class as a whole was moving to the right fast. It was alarmed by the agitation of black people in the South, particularly because this period also saw the rise of mass workers’ militancy and attempts to organise working-class political parties in the North. Remember that this was also the period of the growth of workers’ and socialist movements in Europe, including the Paris Commune in 1871. In addition, a lot of the Southern land was now owned by Northern capitalists and banks.

RACISM

Racism among white workers and poor farmers had been shaken by the revolution. But in order to restore order and guarantee profits, the ruling class withdrew support from the Reconstruction governments in the South and helped the growth of a white supremacist counter-revolution.

In 1877, the year the Northern working class exploded in mass strikes, it withdrew the last troops protecting the Reconstruction regimes and used them to smash the strike wave.

Under the new, counter-revolutionary order in the South, slavery was not restored, but most black Americans were denied political rights, legally segregated, murderous suppressed and subjected to a vicious system of super-exploitation. As Du Bois put it, they “moved back again towards slavery” — not into slavery, but towards it. The class struggle in America was thrown back massively, as was the struggle against racism and for black liberation.

The Southern white supremacist regimes would stay in place until they were challenged by a second Reconstruction, in the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. But by this time racism was deeply woven into the structure of American capitalism. Even when segregation was demolished, the poverty and exclusion of most black Americans remained — and got worse with the neo-liberal capitalist offensive of the 1980s and 90s.

It is this mass of poverty, racism and denial of rights which produces outrages like the state murders which American comrades are protesting against today. Movements against racism, against poverty and against capitalism today can learn a lot from the inspiring struggles of the American Civil War and the revolution it became.

We can pay homage to the heroes of that war, black and white, by fighting to demolish the capitalist system which makes fulfilment of their goals of freedom and equality impossible.

A union which belongs to its members

Gemma Short reviews *Strike for America: Chicago teachers against austerity* by Micah Uetricht.

Uetricht begins his account of the transformation of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) and their 2012 strike by counterposing two incidents representing the opposite faces of teacher trade unionism.

One is represented by Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, sitting on a panel to discuss Chicago's Infrastructure Trust — a public-private partnership initiative which ushered in private involvement in public schools. Speaking alongside Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel, she praised the initiative and made no mention of the Mayor's hostile treatment of teachers and their union, when their union was organising a serious fight back.

The other face of teacher trade unionism is meetings in schools across Chicago to conduct a historic strike ballot in which 90% of all CTU members voted to strike. This happened despite the fact that schools had broken up for the summer. Union members met in closed schools, tracked down members on holiday and spent hours phoning members who couldn't attend meetings to ensure they voted.

In the UK the National Union of Teachers talks about social movement trade unionism.

FANTASY

To accuse the NUT leaders of being the face of teacher unionism represented by Randi Weingarten would be wrong. But to say they represent the spirit and power of the transformed CTU is fantasy.

While it is true that the NUT has tried to learn from and implement some ideas from social movement trade unionism — hosting meetings with speakers from other community campaigns, doing street activity, and commissioning research into educational issues — these lack substance and muscle when decoupled from industrial organisation at a school level. They are also undermined by the stuttering, hesitant nature, and pure mismanagement of the industrial dispute over pensions, and later pay and workload.

The Chicago caucus of rank and file educators (CORE) had years of painstaking organising, first around school closures with local community campaigns, before building influence in the union and taking over its structures from the United Progressive Caucus (UPC).

The Chicago Teachers Union built its structures to actually carry out social movement trade unionism from the school and community level — rather than imposed from above in centrally organised drives, with nice leaflets, social media campaigns and top table speakers.

Uetricht, whilst giving a short and fairly simplistic account of the CTU, CORE and the 2012 strike, nevertheless writes an informative narrative of the history of the leadership of the union prior to CORE.



2012 strike

Many paint the 2010 election of CORE as one where social movement trade unionism won out. Those who were resisting about school closures in neighbourhoods where people of colour lived won against a leadership that said nothing about these issues but had led some militant industrial struggles. This is too simplistic.

Uetricht shows how the UPC had its origins in rank-and-file racial justice caucuses in the union. When they got into leadership they paid themselves large salaries and became disconnected from the rank and file of the union. This led to their silence over social issues and attacks on public education, to a decrease in willingness to lead industrial action over contract negotiations and attacks on teachers.

CORE not only represented social movement trade unionism, but also the struggles of rank and file members fighting school closures and attacks in the face of leadership inaction. Uetricht calls CORE's election the "rejection of a labour model that mandated progressivism from on high". Those [the UPC] who once fought for a democratic and fighting union ended up leading a union that was neither.

In 2011, a year after CORE was elected to the leadership of the CTU, the right-wing free market reform group "Stand for

Children" was trying to push through legislation that, amongst other things, would severely curtail the power of the CTU. Their proposal demanded 75% of members to vote for a strike for it to be legal. Newly elected CTU president and CORE activist Karen Lewis, without significant discussion of the bill by members or proper understanding of its implications, gave the union's endorsement of the bill.

When CTU members heard the details of the bill, instead of uncritically supporting the leadership they had worked hard to elect, they started a dialogue in CORE and then in the union about what to do. A CORE activist took a motion to the union's House of Delegates to overturn the union's endorsement of the bill and reopen negotiations on the bill. They won.

Instead of being defensive, or "selling" the deal to their members, Lewis and the CTU leadership accepted the decision and went back to negotiations. Lewis said "I am not the union — you guys are the union. You're saying that we need to remove our name from this, so I'm going to listen to my members."

ASIDE

Members of the NUT have rarely had enough information about negotiations even to consider their opinion on the implications!

CORE brought the current leadership of the CTU into power, but CORE and the leadership are not one and the same. Many of the CORE leadership are now paid staff and elected officials in the union, so they have stepped aside from the leadership of CORE in order for new people to run it. This means CORE can act independently of the CTU leadership and raise criticisms of it where necessary. The connection with the rank and file prevents the CORE leadership from atrophying and embracing bureaucracy.

Uetricht makes it very clear that there is no short cut to organising this sort of social movement trade unionism or the impressive 2012 Chicago teachers strike. CORE activists had been organising on the ground for years, even decades.

CORE transformed the CTU by educating teachers about neo-liberal school reform. But it did not stop at a leaflet or two, it involved these members in struggles, in educating other teachers, gave them roles in the union, and built structures.

During the 2012 strike much of the action was not organised by CORE staffers in the union. The union had a life of its own at the school level and many organised their own actions independent of the union.

The red t-shirts, mass rallies, and banners inhouse windows were characteristic of the 2012 strike. All of that was down to the members. The union belonged to the members.

A record of plutocracy

Martin Thomas reviews *Cameron's Coup: how the Tories took Britain to the brink*, by Polly Toynbee and David Walker

All the main storylines of Cameron's Britain are there in this book. The food banks. The explosion of payday loans. Plunging wages for young workers, soaring rents and house prices, and almost no social house-building.

The hype about government debt as the monster threatening us all. The social cuts first pushed with the story that they were necessary to tame debt, and then continued, when debt still rises fast, with the story that the capitalist free market will eventually bring prosperity if only liberated from social overheads and from taxes on profits and high incomes.

The press phone-hacking scandal, the Leveson inquiry and its non-outcome, the Scottish disaffection, the scapegoating of the European Union.

"If an abiding impression from the Thatcher era was Covent Garden opera-goers stumbling over rough sleepers in the Strand, Cameron's is food banks. A million people are being fed from them..."

Polly Toynbee is a *Guardian* columnist, now sometimes a

critic of the Labour leadership from the left, although in her basic thinking still an old stalwart of the SDP (the right-wing split from Labour in 1981 which then merged with the Liberals to form today's Liberal Democrats). Her co-author David Walker is her partner and a top official at the Audit Commission.

Towards the end of the book they say flatly that Cameron has governed for "those who possess property and wealth", "for his own kind", for the "plutocracy". "Why not just make corporate chieftains the government?", they ask rhetorically.

The counterpoint in earlier chapters is a presentation of Cameron as "ideological" and driven by "dogma", and his ministers as "not up to it".

The authors wistfully cite another mode of Tory government, that of Cameron's claimed hero Harold Macmillan, prime minister from 1957 to 1963, "a Keynesian, a builder of council houses..."

Macmillan's blander policy reflected the impress on him of a stronger, more confident labour movement. That part of the story is missing for Toynbee and Walker.

They record the results of the defeats of the battles against Cameron's government like the public sector pensions bat-

tle of 2010-1, but without mentioning those battles.

Their vox pop side-stories seek the unusual: small businessmen keen for more public regulation of industrial health and safety and better welfare provision, working-class Tories. No collective body opposed to Cameron, however disarrayed, however dejected for now, is in the picture.

They record that 76% of the population supports cuts, and that the dominant image of a "Labour" person is a fat man stretched on a sofa drinking lager and watching daytime TV.

These statistics, like all others, they report unrigorously. Who was asked? Exactly what question were they asked? What alternatives were proposed to them?...

The statistical sloppiness not only writes the working-class movement out of the picture, but also makes the book less useful than it might be for socialists seeking hard facts to counter the Tories.

Even when the basic drift of their statistics seems surely correct, they lack the detail and the references which would make them stand up against a well-informed and clever Tory opponent.

ICO management impose pay deal

By a PCS member

Following strikes on 3-4 February, 27-28 February and 2 March, management at the Information Commissioner's Office have imposed the disputed new pay offer on staff.

This is despite half the staff having refused to sign up to the offer on an individual basis and demanding they negotiate with the recognised unions.

The pay offer was improved slightly as a result of the strikes, but it remains far short of meeting PCS's demand for a 5% or £1200 increase in annual pay.

Management have been keen to draw a line under the dispute and move on

by making vague promises about looking for ways to "jump the tracks" on pay next year. However, so far their strategy for achieving this appears to be to filibuster until the new European Data Protection Regulation comes into force, which will take several years.

In response to the imposed pay offer the PCS have extended their work to rule for eight weeks until the end of May.

Further industrial action may be considered depending on the situation after the general election and the willingness of any new government to address the issue of historically low pay at the Information Commissioner's Office.

Picturehouse out to break union



By Charlotte Zalens

After last year's successful strike at the Ritzy Picturehouse cinema in Brixton, union BECTU has been seeking union recognition at Clapham Picturehouse as well.

Picturehouse management have hired a "HR consultant" with a union-busting reputation to help them block BECTU recognition. Picturehouse is

claiming that the "staff forum" is the recognised body for negotiations.

On Friday 17 April Picturehouse is opening a new £20 cinema in East Dulwich, South London.

BECTU activists are asking for people to join them in a protest outside the new cinema from 1pm on Saturday 18 April.

• For further details see: facebook.com/CineSolGB

Other industrial news

Unite in talks over London bus drivers pay — bit.ly/bus-pay

Unison probation workers balloted over pay freeze — bit.ly/probation-pay

Join the demonstration against academies in Lewisham — Saturday 25 April, 12pm, Hilly Fields School

Up the ante in Network Rail pay dispute

After members of the rail union RMT working for Network Rail rejected a pay offer by 93%, the company made an improved offer, which union reps will meet to discuss on 16 April. A Network Rail worker spoke to *Solidarity*.

Network Rail management cannot have it both ways.

While our recent pay increases have been better than in standard in the private sector, they have still been effectively holding settlements — i.e., in line with inflation, but not an improvement in our standard of living.

Now, with the economy supposedly doing better, we were first offered a pay freeze for 2015, then only RPI for 2016, 2017, and 2018. After we rejected that,

the company has offered a £500 non-consolidated lump-sum for 2015, with the next three years still tied to RPI (although with a promise of no pay cuts if RPI falls below zero).

We want improvements, especially when some parts of the private sector, which management want to use as the yardstick against which to measure our pay, have had increases in pay higher than inflation.

The promise of no compulsory redundancies has been another stick which management try to use on these occasions: "Accept a lower pay deal and we won't get rid of so many of you". This is yet another con.

In the course of our recent two-year settlements, with the "no redundancies" clause in place, how many

re-organisations have taken place where jobs have been reduced under spurious "natural wastage" and the non-filling of vacancies?

The truth is that the workforce has shrunk, and we are all having to work harder to fill the gaps. Our increased productivity alone should earn us a hefty increase, but all we have seen is an increase in management bonuses.

The so-called "travel concessions" offered were not much help either, as they represent nothing more than what any member of the travelling public with access to a paid-for discount railcard would get. Network Rail has withdrawn this offer in the "improved" deal.

It's positive that the first pay offer was so overwhelmingly rejected in the



recent ballot, but the obvious question is why the union didn't ballot for strikes at the same time. It was clear people opposed the lousy offer, but the leadership ducked the issue by making the ballot merely consultative.

It sends the message that our own leadership has no confidence in either the membership's willingness to fight, or in their own ability to build confidence.

First Great Western staff ballot over job cuts

By Ollie Moore

Members of rail union RMT working for First Great Western are preparing to ballot for industrial action, after First Group announced plans to axe jobs on new inter-city services.

On the new trains, the driver will have sole responsibility for operating the doors, meaning guards are no longer required. The doors could even be operated with the driver as the only member of staff on board, without even an additional train manager.

Catering facilities will also be reduced, with passengers in standard class



having access only to an at-seat trolley service, meaning a reduction in buffet-car jobs.

"Driver-Only-Operation" (DOO) is the aim of main train companies, with RMT fighting "Keep The Guard On The Train" campaigns at

many companies throughout the UK.

A statement from the union emphasised that the dispute also has passengers' rights to a decent service at its heart: "First Group are working hand in glove with this government of the rich,

for the rich and by the rich in introducing an 'Upstairs-Downstairs' service on Britain's long haul rail services which would condemn the vast majority to pay through the nose to travel in rammed-out carriages where the catering trolley is jammed at one end while the elite glide through the country like extras from Downton Abbey.

"First were recently handed a cash-laden, taxpayer-sponsored contract extension on First Great Western without any competition and clearly see that as a green light to smash up jobs, safety and working conditions as they milk the deal for all its worth."

Council workers vote to strike over outsourcing

By Gemma Short

Unison members working for Barnet Council have voted by 87% to strike over outsourcing.

The council agreed last month to outsource the "education, skills and school meals" department, libraries, early years children's centres, adult social care and street scene services.

UNISON Branch Secretary John Burgess said "The vote was never in doubt. The workforce in Barnet is amazing and resilient. The

vote confirms that our members have had enough of the ideological obsession with outsourcing. The Council does not value the workforce which can be seen when unpaid overtime and long hours are never recognised when putting together bids for outsourcing projects. The fact that the Council refuses to run in-house comparators has made it clear to our members that their future employment with the Council is threatened."

Care workers for outsourced service Your



Choice Barnet are continuing their campaign against a 9.5% pay cut.

Barnet Unison and Barnet Alliance for Public

Services are organising actions at libraries that are under threat.

• More information: www.barnetunison.me.uk



Solidarity

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Killer cops are charged

By Gemma Short

Michael Slager, the cop who killed unarmed black man, Walter Scott, on 5 April in North Charleston, South Carolina, has been charged with murder, and another cop in a similar case in Oklahoma with manslaughter.

The murder charge was brought only after an eye witness handed over to police mobile phone footage of the event showing Walter being shot eight times in the back as he ran away from Slager. The witness also said there was a struggle in which Slager used his taser on Walter before Walter got away and ran.

Police spokespeople has originally reported that Walter had taken Slager's taser and used it against him. The video shows Slager picking up the taser from the ground and placing it next to Walter after he has been shot.

Audio and video recordings from the police car have now been released which corroborate the film. They show Walter being stopped by Slager for having a broken brake light. As Slager returns to the police car to check the license Walter opens his car door to get out, Slager tells him to stay in the car which he does for a short while before running away.

On the audio recording a conversation between Slager and his senior officer immediately after the shooting can be heard. Slager says "adrenaline is pumping" and he is laughing. The senior officer assures Slager he will not face questioning for a few days.

Without the video footage the case would be no different from many other shootings of unarmed black men by police in America. In such cases cops have not been indicted or have been charged with manslaughter and found not guilty. Walter's father, Walter Scott Sr thanked the witness for filming the event: "It would've never come to light [without the video] – they would've swept it under the rug like they've done many others." Indeed.

TESTIMONY

Protesters gathered at North Charleston city hall on Wednesday 4 April to listen to two hours of testimony about police discrimination and harassment of black communities.

On 2 April, 44 year old black man Eric Harris was shot dead by 73 year old volunteer police officer Bob Bates in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Bates has been charged with second-degree manslaughter after claiming he shot Eric accidentally, as he took his

gun not his taser from his belt.

Eric had been stopped in a sting operation, to catch Eric buying a gun. Police claim the operation went wrong and Eric ran away. Police tackled him to the ground, at which point Bates says pulled his taser to subdue Eric.

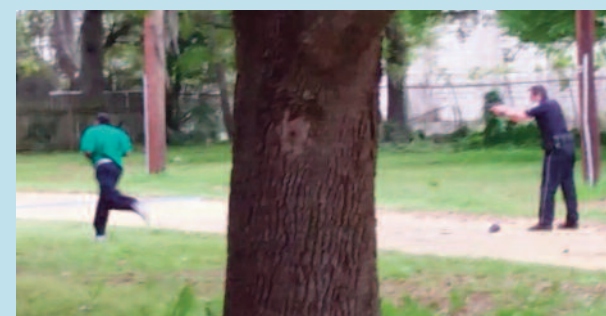
Footage from police body cameras show that officers treated Eric as if his life had no value. After Eric has been shot they continue to hold him down. One officer is heard to shout "Shut the fuck up ... You ran, motherfucker, do you hear me, you fucking ran."

When Eric says "I'm losing my breath," an officer replies: "Fuck your breath." Eric later died in hospital.

If the killer of Walter Scott is found guilty and punished (and those are big ifs in the racist American criminal justice system) it will be some sort of vindication for the relatives and friends, neighbours and co-workers of the hundreds of people who have mourned for people who have died at the hands of these armed thugs.

For the working-class and black people who have put up with official disregard for their lives and their communities.

A small step forward in the much bigger fight to smash US inequality and eradicate the violence it generates.



Officer Slager's defence

By Janine Booth

Officer Michael T Slager, how do you plead to the charge of the murder of Walter L Scott?

I plead not guilty

On the grounds that it is well-established

That it is lawful for a white cop to kill a black person

I plead not guilty

On the grounds of provocation

He was black in a public place

How is a responsible officer supposed to react?!

I plead not guilty

On the grounds that he was running away

And therefore obviously guilty

Of having a broken tail-light

I plead not guilty

On the grounds of self-defence

As a white cop, I believed him to be black and threatening

I had to protect myself

I plead not guilty

Under the "stand your ground" law

I stood my ground

And shot him eight times

I plead not guilty

Not on the grounds of

Temporary insanity

But of permanent inhumanity

I plead not guilty

On the grounds that it is well-established

That it is lawful for a white cop to kill a black person

I cite the following case law:

Officer Daniel Pantaleo killed Eric Garner, New York City — no charge

Officer Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown, Ferguson — no charge

Two officers shot and killed Gabriella Nevaraz, Sacramento — no charge

I rest my case

The defendant shall rise

Officer Michael T. Slager, your plea is rejected on the grounds that

Although it is indeed lawful for a white cop to kill a black person

It is a crime to be filmed doing so

Guilty. Of murder. And extreme carelessness.

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